

Stem Cell Agency Board Approves 50th Clinical Trial

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Oakland, CA – May 4th, 2011 marked a landmark moment for the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM). On that day the Stem Cell Agency's Board voted to invest in its first ever clinical trial, which was also the first clinical trial to use cells derived from embryonic stem cells. Today the Stem Cell Agency reached another landmark, with the Board voting to approve its 50th clinical trial.

"We have come a long way in the past seven and a half years, helping advance the field from its early days to a much more mature space today, one capable of producing new treatments and even cures," says Jonathan Thomas, JD, PhD, Chair of the CIRM Board. "But we feel that in many ways we are just getting started, and we intend funding as many additional clinical trials as we can for as long as we can."

The project approved today awards almost \$6.2 million to Angiocrine Bioscience Inc. to see if genetically engineered cells, derived from cord blood, can help alleviate or accelerate recovery from the toxic side effects of chemotherapy for people undergoing treatment for lymphoma and other aggressive cancers of the blood or lymph system.

"This is a project that CIRM has supported from an earlier stage of research, highlighting our commitment to moving the most promising research out of the lab and into people," says Maria T. Millan, MD, President & CEO of CIRM. "Lymphoma is the most common blood cancer and the 6th most commonly diagnosed cancer in California. Despite advances in therapy many patients still suffer severe complications from the chemotherapy, so any treatment that can reduce those complications can not only improve quality of life but also, we hope, improve long term health outcomes for patients."

The first clinical trial CIRM funded was with Geron, targeting spinal cord injury. While Geron halted the trial for business reasons (and returned the money, with interest) the mantle was later picked up by Asterias Biotherapeutics, which has now treated 25 patients with no serious side effects and some encouraging results.

Rich Lajara was part of the Geron trial, the first patient ever treated in a CIRM-funded clinical trial. He came to the CIRM Board meeting to tell his story saying when he was injured "I knew immediately I was paralyzed. I thought this was the end, little did I know this was just the beginning. I call it being in the wrong place at the right time."

When he learned about the Geron clinical trial he asked how many people had been treated with stem cells. "Close to none" he was told. Nonetheless he went ahead with it. He says he has never regretted that decision, knowing it helped inform the research that has since helped others.

Since that first trial the Stem Cell Agency has funded a wide range of projects targeting heart disease and stroke, cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and several rare diseases. You can see the full list on the Clinical Trials Dashboard page on our website.

Rich ended by saying: "CIRM has proven how much can be achieved if we invest in cutting-edge medical research. As most of you here probably know, CIRM's funding from Proposition 71 is about to run out. If I had just one message I wanted people to leave with today it would be this, I will do everything I can to make sure the agency gets refunded and I hope that all of you will join me in that fight. I'm excited for the world of stem cells, particularly in California and can't wait to see what's on the horizon."

The CIRM Board also took time today to honor Dr. Bert Lubin, who is stepping down after serving almost eight years on the Board.

When he joined the Board in February, 2011 Dr. Lubin said: "I hope to use my position on this committee to advocate for stem cell research that translates into benefits for children and adults, not only in California but throughout the world."

Over the years he certainly lived up to that goal. As a CIRM Board member he has supported research for a broad range of unmet medical needs, and specifically for curative treatments for children born with a rare life-threatening conditions such as Sickle Cell Disease and Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID) as well as treatments to help people battling vision destroying diseases.

As the President & CEO of Children's Hospital Oakland (now UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland) Dr. Lubin was a leader in helping

advance research into new treatments for sickle cell disease and addressing health disparities in diseases such as asthma, diabetes and obesity.

Senator Art Torres said he has known Dr. Lubin since the 1970's and in all that time has been impressed by his devotion to patients, and his humility, and that all Californians should be grateful to him for his service, and his leadership.

Dr. Lubin said he was "Really grateful to be on the Board and I consider it an honor to be part of a group that benefits patients."

He said he may be stepping down from the CIRM Board but that was all: "I am going to retire the word retirement. I think it's a mistake to stop doing work that you find stimulating. I'm going to re-purpose the rest of my life, and work to make sure the treatments we've helped develop are available to everyone. I am so proud to be part of this. I am stepping down, but I am devoted to doing all I can to ensure that you get the resources you need to sustain this work for the future."

About CIRM

At CIRM, we never forget that we were created by the people of California to accelerate stem cell treatments to patients with unmet medical needs, and act with a sense of urgency to succeed in that mission.

To meet this challenge, our team of highly trained and experienced professionals actively partners with both academia and industry in a hands-on, entrepreneurial environment to fast track the development of today's most promising stem cell technologies.

With \$3 billion in funding and approximately 300 active stem cell programs in our portfolio, CIRM is the world's largest institution dedicated to helping people by bringing the future of cellular medicine closer to reality.

For more information go to www.cirm.ca.gov

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